

The Romance of Elaine

Sequel to The Exploits of Elaine

A Detective Novel
and a Motion Picture
Drama

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THIRTY-FOURTH EPISODE

THE HARBOR DEFENSE PLANS.

Alone in the doorway before his rude shack on the shore of the promontory sat an old fisherman, gazing out fixedly at the harbor as though deeply concerned over the weather, which, as usual, was unseasonable.

Suddenly he started and would have disappeared into his hut but for the fact that, although he could not himself be seen, he had already seen the intruder.

It was a trapper from Fort Dale. He galloped up and, as though obeying to the letter his instructions, handed an envelope to the fisherman. Then, without a word, he galloped away again.

The fisherman opened it quickly. Inside was a photograph and a note. He read:

FORT DALE.

Professor Arnold:
J. Smith, clerk in the war department, has disappeared. We are not sure, but fear that he has a copy of the new Sandy Hook defense plans. It is believed he is headed your way. He walks with a slight limp. Look out for him.

LIEUTENANT WOODWARD.

For a long time the fisherman appeared to study the face on the photograph until he had it indelibly implanted in his memory.

Finally he turned and entered his hut. Hastily he took off his stained reefer. From a wooden chest he drew another outfit of clothes. The transformation was complete. When he issued forth from his hut again, it was no longer the aged disciple of Izaak Walton. He was now a trim chauffeur, bearded and goggled.

In the library of his bungalow, Del Mar was pacing up and down, now and then scowling to himself, as though there flashed over his mind stray recollections of how some of his most cherished plans were miscarrying.

Still, on the whole, he had nothing to complain of. For, a moment later the valet entered with a telegram for which he had evidently been waiting. Del Mar seized it eagerly and tore open the yellow envelope. On the blank was printed in the usual way the following noncommittal message: Washington, D. C., August 12, 1915. Mr. Del Mar:

What you request is coming. Answer to sign of the ring. SMITH.
"Good," muttered Del Mar as he finished reading. "Strange, what a little gold will do—when you know how to dispose of it."

He smiled cynically to himself at the sentiment.

At the little railroad station they were quite proud of the fact that at least two of the four hacks had been replaced already by taxicabs.

It was, then, with some surprise and not a little open jealousy that they saw a new taxicab drive up and take its stand by the platform.

If the chauffeur, transformed from the lonely fisherman, had expected a cordial reception, he might better have stayed before his hut, for the glances the other drivers gave him were as black and lowering as the clouds he had been looking at.

The new chauffeur got off his seat. Instead of trying to brazen it out, he walked over to the others who were standing in a group waiting for the approaching train whose whistle had already sounded.

"I'm not going to locate here permanently," he said, pulling out a roll of bills as he spoke. "Leave any fare I claim to me," he added, passing a bill of a good denomination to each of the four Jehus.

"All right, bo," they agreed. Thundering down the platform came the afternoon train, a great event in the town life.

From the Pullman alighted a widow, in deep mourning. As she got off and moved down the platform it was apparent that she walked with a pronounced limp.

At the end of the platform the chauffeurs were still calling, while the newcomer looked over the crowd hastily. Suddenly he caught sight of the face of the widow. He stepped forward as she approached. The others held back as they had agreed and paid no attention. It was like forcing a card.

He held the door open and she entered the cab, unsuspecting. "Mr. Del Mar's," she directed, simply.

He pulled away from the station. On through the pretty country roads the

chauffeur drove the heavily veiled widow until at last they came to Del Mar's bungalow.

At the gate he stopped and ran around to open the door to assist his fare to alight.

"Wait for me," she said, without paying him yet. "I shall not be long and I want to be driven back to the station to catch the four twenty-nine to New York."

As she limped up the gravel walk he watched her closely. She went to the door and rang the bell and the valet admitted her.

Del Mar was still sitting, thinking, in the library.

"Mr. Del Mar?" she inquired.

The voice was not exactly soft, and Del Mar eyed her suspiciously. Was this the person he expected, or a "plant"?

"Yes," he answered, guardedly, "I am Del Mar. And you?"

The widow, too, evidently wished to make no mistake. As she spoke, she raised her hand. By that simple action she displayed a curious and conspicuous seal ring on her finger. It was the sign of the ring for which Del Mar had been waiting.

He extended his own left hand. On the ring finger was another ring, but not similar. As he did so, the widow took the ring from her own finger and placed it on the little finger of Del Mar.

"Good!" he exclaimed.

The woman raised her thick veil, disclosing the face of—a man!

It was the same face, also, that had appeared in the photograph sent to the old fisherman by Woodward.

Awkwardly, the man searched in the front of his shirtwaist and drew forth a paper which Del Mar almost seized in his eagerness. It was a pen and ink copy of a government map, showing a huge spit of sand in the sea before a harbor, Sandy Hook and New York. On it were indicated all the defenses, the positions of guns, everything.

The chauffeur had no intention of remaining inactive outside while he knew that something that interested him was transpiring inside. He had crept up by the side of the house to the window. But he could see little and hear nothing.

A moment he strained every sense. It was no use. He must devise some other way. How could he get into that room? Slowly he returned to his car, thinking it over. There he stood for a moment revolving in his mind what to do. He looked up the road. An idea came to him. There he saw a little runabout approaching rapidly.

Quickly he went around to the front of his car and lifted up the hood. Then he bent over and pretended to be tinkering with his engine.

As the car was about to pass he deliberately stepped back, apparently not seeing the runabout, and was struck and knocked down.

The runabout stopped, the emergency brakes biting hard.

Elaine had asked me to go shopping in the village with her that afternoon. While I waited for her in her little car she came down at last carrying a little handbag. We drove off a moment later.

It was a delightful ride, not too warm, but sunny. Without realizing it, we found ourselves on the road that led past Del Mar's.

As we approached, I saw that there was a taxicab standing in front of the gate. The hood was lifted and the driver was apparently tinkering with his engine.

"Let's not stop," said Elaine, who had by this time a peculiar aversion to the man.

As we passed the driver, apparently not seeing us, stepped out and, before we could turn out, we had knocked him down. We stopped and ran back.

There he lay on the road, seemingly unconscious. We lifted him up and I looked toward Del Mar's house.

"Help!" I shouted at the top of my voice.

The valet came to the door.

Hearing me, the valet ran out down the walk. "All right," he cried, "I'll be there in a minute."

With his help I picked up the taxicab chauffeur and we carried him into the house.

Del Mar was talking with a person who looked like a widow, when they heard our approach up the walk carrying the injured man.

So engrossed had they been in discerning what the stolen document contained that, as we finally entered, the widow had only time to drop her veil

and conceal her identity as the renegade Smith. Del Mar still held the plan in his hand.

The valet and I entered with Elaine and we placed the chauffeur on a couch near Del Mar's desk. I remember that there was this strange woman all in black, heavily veiled, in the room at the time.

"I think we ought to telephone for a doctor," said Elaine, placing her handbag on the desk and excitedly telling Del Mar how we had accidentally knocked the man down.

"Call up my doctor, Henry," said Del Mar, hastily thrusting the plan into a book lying on the desk.

We gathered about the man, trying to revive him.

"Have you a little stimulant?" I asked, turning from him.

Del Mar moved toward a cellarette built into the wall. We were all watching him, our backs to the chauffeur, when suddenly he must have regained consciousness very much. Like a flash his hand shot out. He seized the plan from between the leaves of the book. He had not time to get away with it himself. Perhaps he might be searched. He opened Elaine's bag and thrust it in.

The valet by this time had finished telephoning and spoke to Del Mar.

"The doctor will be here shortly, Miss Dodge," said Del Mar. "You need not wait, if you don't care to. I'll take care of him."

"Oh, thank you—ever so much," she murmured. "Of course it wasn't our fault, but I feel sorry for the poor fellow. Tell the doctor to send me the bill."

She and Del Mar shook hands. I thought he held her hand perhaps a little longer and a little tighter than usual. At any rate Elaine seemed to think so.

"Why, what a curious ring, Mr. Del Mar," she said, finally releasing her hand from his grasp.

Then she looked quickly at the woman, half joking, as if the ring had something to do with the strange woman. She looked back at the ring. Del Mar smiled, shook his head and laughed easily.

Then Elaine picked up her bag and we went out. A moment later we had climbed back into the car and were off again.

Having left us at the door, Del Mar hurried back to the library. He went straight to the desk and picked up the book, eager now to make sure of the safety of his plan.

It was gone!

"Did you, Smith?" he began hastily, then checked himself, knowing that the clerk had not taken the plan.

Del Mar walked over to the couch and stood a moment looking at the chauffeur. "I wonder who he is," he said to himself. "I don't recall ever seeing him at the station or in the village."

He leaned closer. "The deuce!" he exclaimed, "that's a fake beard the fellow has on."

Del Mar made a lunge for it. As he did so the chauffeur leaped to his feet. "Hands up!" he shouted. "And the first man that moves is a dead one!"

Before the secret agent knew it both he and Smith were covered. The chauffeur took a step toward Smith and unceremoniously jerked off the widow's weeds, as well as the wig.

At that very moment one of Del Mar's men came up to the secret panel that opened from the underground passageway into the library. He was about to open it when he heard a sound on the other side that startled him. He listened a moment then slid it just a short distance and looked in.

There he saw a chauffeur holding up Del Mar and Smith. Having pulled the disguise from Smith, he went next around Del Mar and took his gun from his pocket, then passed his hands over the folds of Smith's dress, but found no weapon. He stepped back away from them.

At that point the man quietly slid the panel all the way open and silently stepped into the room, behind the chauffeur. Cautiously he began sneaking up on him.

As he did so, Del Mar and Smith watched, fascinated. Somehow, their faces must have betrayed that something was wrong. For as the newcomer leaped at him, the chauffeur turned suddenly and fired. The shot wounded the man.

It was a signal for a free-for-all fight.

Del Mar knocked the revolver out of the chauffeur's hand. With a blow of a chair, the chauffeur laid out Smith, entangled in his unfamiliar garments, shook himself loose from the two others, and made a rush for the door.

Hard after him came Del Mar and the rest, joined now by Henry the valet. One shot was left in the chauffeur's revolver, and he blazed away and leaped into the car.

"He got me," groaned Smith as he stumbled and fell forward.

On came Del Mar and the others. They caught up with the car just as it was starting. But the chauffeur knocked the gun from Del Mar's hand before he could get a good aim and fire, at the same time bowling over

the man who had come through the panel.

Off the car went, now rapidly gaining speed. Del Mar had just time to swing on the rear of it.

Around the rapidly driven car he climbed, hanging on for dear life, over the mud guard and toward the running board. On sped the car, swaying crazily back and forth. Del Mar crouched on the running board and worked his way slowly and perilously to the front seat.

The chauffeur felt the weight of someone on that side. Just as he turned to see what it was Del Mar leaped at him.

Somehow Elaine and I must have been hoodooed that day.

We had not been gone five minutes from Del Mar's after the accident to the chauffeur, when we heard a mysterious knock in the engine.

"More engine trouble," I sighed. Pull up along the road and I'll see if I can fix it."

We stopped and both got out. There was no fake about this trouble or about the dirt and grease I acquired on my hands and face tinkering with that motor.

"Here, let me powder your nose, Walter," she said, undismayed at our trouble, gayly opening her bag. "Well—of all things, what's this, and where did it come from?"

I turned from the engine and looked. She was holding some kind of plan or document in her hand. In blank surprise she examined it.

"What do you think it is, Walter?" she asked, handing it to me.

I took it and examined it carefully. Incredible as it seemed, I figured out quickly that it must be nothing short of a plan of the new defenses at Sandy Hook.

I fell to work again, eager to get away with our dangerous prize, Elaine now and then advising me. Finally I turned the engine over. For a wonder it ran smoothly.

"What's the matter now?" exclaimed Elaine, turning quickly and looking up the road along which we had just come.

There, lurching along at full speed was a car. Two men were actually fighting on the front of it, regardless of speed and safety.

On rushed the car, directly at us. Just as it passed us, the chauffeur seemed to summon all his strength. He struck a powerful blow at the man, recoiled and straightened out his car just in time. The man fell, literally at our feet.

It was Del Mar himself!

"Why, what's all this about?" I asked eagerly.

Before I could raise him up Del Mar had regained his feet.

"Just a plain crook, who attacked me," he muttered, brushing off his clothes to cover up the quick recognition of what it was that I was holding in my hand, for he had seen the plan immediately.

"Can't we drive you back?" asked Elaine.

He climbed up and sat on the floor of the roadster, his feet outside, and we drove off. At last we pulled up at the Dodge hall again.

"Won't you come in?" asked Elaine as we got out.

"Thank you, I believe I will for a few minutes," consented Del Mar, concealing his real eagerness to follow me. "I'm all shaken up."

As we entered the living room I was thinking about the map. I opened a table drawer, hastily took the plan from my pocket and locked it in the drawer. Elaine, meanwhile, was standing with Del Mar, who was talking, but in reality watching me closely.

Down the road past where we had turned, before a pretty little shingle house, the taxicab chauffeur stopped. One of the bullets had taken effect on him, and his shoulder was bleeding. But the worst, as he seemed to think it, was that another shot had given him a flat tire.

He jumped out and looked up the road whence he had come. "No one was following him. Still, he was worried. He went around to look at the tire. But he was too weak now from loss of blood. It had been nerve and reserve force that had carried him through. Now that the strain was off, he felt the reaction to the full.

Just then the doctor and his driver, whom the valet had already summoned to Del Mar's, came speeding down the road. The doctor saw the chauffeur fall in a half faint, stopped his car and ran to him. The chauffeur had kept up as long as he could. He had now sunk down beside his machine in the road.

A moment later they picked him up and carried him into the house. There was no acting about his hurt now. In the house they laid the man down on a couch and the doctor made a hasty examination.

"How is he?" asked one of the kind Samaritans.

"The wound is not dangerous," replied the physician, "but he's lost a lot of blood. He cannot be moved for some time yet."

We talked about nothing else at Dodge Hall after dressing for dinner

but the strange events over at Del Mar's, and what had followed. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed to me that we would never be left over night in peaceful possession of the plan which both Elaine and I decided ought on the following day to be sent to Washington.

Accordingly I cudgled my brain for some method of protecting both ourselves and it. The only thing I could think of was a scheme once adopted by Kennedy in another case.

I had a small quick-shutter camera that had belonged to Craig, and just as we were about to retire, I brought it into the living room with a package I had sent up from the village.

As soon as Elaine had gone to bed and I was alone, I opened the package. There were the tools that I had ordered, a coil of wire and some dry cells. Then I went to the table, unlocked the drawer and put the plan in my pocket.

Although I was no expert at wiring, I started to make the connections under the table with the drawer, not a very difficult thing to do as long as it was to be only temporary and for the night. From the table I ran the wires along the edge of the carpet until I came to the bookcase. There, masked by the books, I placed the little quick-shutter camera, and at a distance also concealed the flashlight pan.

Next I aimed the camera carefully and focused it on a point above the drawer in the writing table where anyone would be likely to stand if he attempted to open it. Then I connected the shutter of the camera and a little spark coil in the flash pan with the wires, using an apparatus to work the shutter such as I recalled having seen Craig use. Finally I covered the sparking device with the flashlight powder, gave a last look around, and snapped off the light.

Up in my bedroom, I must say I felt like "some" detective and I could not help slapping myself on the chest for the ingenuity with which I had duplicated Craig.

Half asleep I heard a muffled explosion, as if of a flashlight. I started up and listened. Surely someone was moving about downstairs. I pulled my gun from my pocket and ran out of the room. Down the steps I flung myself, two at a time.

In the living room I switched on the lights in time to see someone disappear through an open window. I ran to the window and looked out. There was a man, half doubled up, running around the side of the house and into a clump of bushes, then apparently lost. I shot out of the window and called.

I was not the only one who heard the noise. The shots quickly awakened Elaine, and she leaped out of bed and put on her kimono. Then she lighted the lights and came downstairs.

The intruder had disappeared by this time and I had got up and was peering out of the window as she came breathlessly into the living room.

"What's the matter, Walter?" she asked.

"Someone broke into the house after those plans," I replied. "He escaped, but I got his picture, I think, by this device of Kennedy's. Let's go into a dark room and develop it."

There was no use trying to follow the man farther. To Elaine's inquiry of what I meant, I replied by merely going over to the spot where I had hidden the camera and disconnecting it.

We went upstairs where I had rigged up an improvised dark room for my amateur photographic work some days before. Elaine watched me closely. At last I found that I had developed something. As I drew the film through the hypo tray and picked it up I held it to the red light.

Elaine leaned over and looked at the film with me. There was a picture of a masked man, his cap down, in a startled attitude, his hands clapped to his face, completely hiding what the mask did not hide.

"Well, I'll be blowed!" I cried in chagrin at the outcome of what I thought had been my cleverest coup.

A little exclamation of astonishment escaped Elaine. I turned to her. "What is it?" I asked.

"The ring!" she cried.

"I looked more closely. On the little finger of the left hand was a peculiar ring. Once seen, I think it was not readily forgotten."

"The ring!" she repeated excitedly. "Don't you remember—that ring? I saw it on Mr. Del Mar's hand—at his house—this afternoon!"

I could only stare.

At last we had a real clue!

In his bungalow, Del Mar at that moment threw down his hat and tore off his mask furiously.

What had he done?

For a long time he sat there, his chin on his hands, gazing fixedly before him, planning to protect himself and for revenge.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Safer Way.
"Why do you let that policeman gobble your peanuts?" "I don't want to be murdered," answered the New York vander, with a grin.